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AUTHOR	Downey, Matthew T.
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ABSTRACT

The three problems approaches outlined for an introductory, interdisciplinary course provide opportunities to apply the methodological tools and perspectives of the social studies. Organization of each course, advantages and disadvantages, unique objectives, approaches, and methodology for a social problem approach, case study approach, and a problem solving approach are summarized briefly. Each alternative includes some variation of team teaching, and is consistent with an underlying rationale that an introductory social studies course should lay the groundwork for more specialized courses in the curriculum. The implicit assumption is that the practitioners of the social studies do not necessarily study different things, but that they do study things in different ways. (VLW)

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PROBLEMS APPROACHES TO THE SOCIAL STUDIES:

ALTERNATIVE STRUCTURES FOR AN INTRODUCTORY COURSE.

Matthew T. Downey
Coordinator
Boulder Regional Center

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Introductory Note:

This paper was prepared in response to a request by Mr. Lawrence Dorsey, Head, Social Studies Department, Fairview High School, Boulder, Colorado, for alternative structures for an introductory and multi-disciplinary course in the social studies. It was prepared by the coordinator of the History Education Project's Boulder Regional Center in consultation with a University of Colorado H.E.P. Social Studies Curriculum Advisory Committee.* The Boulder Regional Center was established in September, 1970 to provide assistance to schools and universities within its region interested in improving history and social studies education. In matters of curriculum development it functions as a non-profit and whenever possible as a no-charge consulting service. Its policy is to suggest alternative possibilities, but not to prescribe a curriculum. Responsibility for the latter rests solely upon the departments, schools, or school districts which solicit this service.

I. The Problem:

Fairview High School is developing a new course entitled "Introduction to the Social Studies," which will be required of all tenth grade students beginning in the fall semester of 1971. The course will probably be offered during four periods of the day (M-W-F) by ten to twelve full or part-time faculty members, each of whom will probably teach the course two periods per day. Possibilities for team teaching obviously exist. However, the pressure

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*The H.E.P. Social Studies Curriculum Advisory Committee consists of the following University of Colorado professors: James Jankowski (Department of History), A. David Hill (Department of Geography), Larry Singell (Department of Economics), Donald Weatherley(Department of Psychology), and John D. Haas (Director, Center for Education in the Social Sciences, University of Colorado, and professor in the School of Education). Professor Lawrence Senesh of the Department of Economics was also consulted in the preparation of this paper, although the suggested adaption of his problems approach is solely the responsibility of the author.

of time and limited financial resources do not permit an extensive course-development project. The problem is to develop a structure for the new course which will permit a meaningful introduction to the social studies within the limitations described above.

II. Alternative Solutions:

The following are some alternative structures for an introductory, multi-disciplinary course in the social studies. Each alternative incorporates a problem oriented approach. The underlying assumption is that learning experiences in the social studies are most meaningful when students are actively involved in the learning process. This means that they should have opportunities to apply the methodological tools and perspectives of the several social studies, rather than spending their whole time passively learning about these disciplines. The problems approach lends itself very well to this purpose. Each alternative also includes some variation of team teaching. While the team approach may or may not be the most effective means of teaching large numbers of students, it does permit the specialization and cooperative effort which is absolutely essential for the development of an entirely new course with new course materials in a very short period of time. The team approach was included primarily for that reason.

Finally, each of the following approaches is consistent with an underlying rationale that an introductory social studies course should lay the groundwork for more specialized courses in the curriculum. The introductory course should give students a basic understanding of the different perspectives

from which historians, geographers, and social scientists approach social reality and some facility in the use of the various analytical tools of those disciplines. The implicit assumption here is that the practitioners of the social studies do not necessarily study different things, but that they do study things in different ways. The fundamental differences between disciplines are matters of perception and methodology and even these differences are frequently muddied. Thus, any given piece of social reality or any social problem can be studied from each of the several social studies perspectives.

1. The Social Problem Approach:

The course could be organized around a major social problem about which students are obviously concerned. The problem, why poverty exists in an affluent society, is one example. The object of the course is to demonstrate how the several social studies disciplines can contribute to an understanding of the problem.

The course would incorporate the six social studies disciplines currently represented in the Fairview curriculum: history, geography, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology. It would be organized in three-week units, each unit being devoted to one of the disciplines. Each unit would be taught concurrently to six groups of students each period in which the course is offered. Each teacher would be responsible for preparing one three-week unit, which he would teach six times during the semester to six different groups of students. The teacher would teach his unit two

periods each day. For example:

Class Period #1:

Student Groups -- Weeks:	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	16-18
1	Hist.	Geog.	Econ.	Pol. Sci.	Psych.	Sociology
2	Soc.	Hist.	Geog.	Econ.	Pol. Sci.	Psych.
3	Psych	Soc.	Hist.	Geog.	Econ.	Pol. Sci.
4	Pol. Sci.	Psych.	Soc.	Hist.	Geog.	Econ.
5	Econ.	Pol. Sci.	Psych	Soc.	Hist.	Geog.
6	Geog.	Econ.	Pol. Sci.	Psych	Soc.	Hist.

Each teacher would be responsible for collecting sufficient material for a three-week unit which might provide the student with 1) a brief introduction to conceptual and methodological tools of the discipline, 2) an example of how a historian or social scientist has applied these tools to the problem, i.e., a journal article, and 3) data which the student can use in an exercise applying such tools to some aspect of the problem.

The major advantage of this approach is that it limits the amount of new materials which each teacher is responsible for developing. Moreover, by teaching his unit six times during the semester, he will have ample opportunity to revise and improve the unit in light of the successive try-outs. This will also help to overcome the major disadvantage of requiring teachers to develop units in which they may not be specialists. If twelve teachers are teaching the course, two would present the perspectives of sociology, two of political science, and so forth. This disadvantage does not seem to us to be in any sense a fatal one. We can think of a worse classroom atmosphere than one in which teacher and students are both involved in a similar learning process, provided

that in-service opportunities are provided for the teacher. Outside resource people, such as CU social scientists, graduate students, and undergraduate majors, could take part of the burden off the teacher.

2. The Case Study Approach:

The course could also be organized around a series of "case studies" or problem situations. Its purpose would still be to introduce the perspectives of the social studies through the investigation of problems. The problems, however, would be quite specific ones studied in concrete contemporary or historical situations ("Hippies in Boulder: The Up-Tight Town") or regional ones (Smoke Stacks in the Four-Corners: Polluting the West.") or case studies on the national level ("Whatever Happened to the War on Poverty?"). They could also be historical case studies ("Why did Patrick Henry Oppose the Constitution?"). In each instance the several perspectives of the social studies would be brought to bear in the students' analysis of the problem.

The course could begin with an introductory unit in which the various disciplinary perspectives and methods of analysis are examined in a case study context. Material could be gathered for a case study which has already been analyzed by historians and social scientists, for example, a ghetto riot of the 1960's. The students would then proceed to study two or three new case studies for which data is presented to them. Their responsibility would be to analyze the data from various perspectives using packets of information provided by the teachers. The possibilities for structural variation are

practically unlimited. For example,

1) a classroom broken down into small groups, each group approaching a case study from a different perspective, using the classroom teacher as a resource person.

2) several classrooms, each approaching a case study from different perspectives using the several teachers as a resource team.

3) large groups composed of more than one classroom which meet together periodically for presentations by the teachers or by students, but which divide up into smaller working groups, each dealing with a case study.

The advantage of this approach is that it permits maximum flexibility and it gives the students exposure to a greater variety of problems which can be examined from social studies perspectives. It also affords somewhat greater opportunities for students fo work in a variety of learning situations, including investigations within the community. The disadvantages are those inherent in teaching in less structured situations. The teachers must be flexible and be prepared to respond to unpredictable demands upon their own resources. For case studies beyond the immediate community and to some extent even for those, the teachers must also prepare folders of data with which the students will work. This approach would require much more time spent in course preparation than the approach suggested above.

The implementation of this approach might require both an in-service program for the teachers and compensation during the summer for several teachers to do the research required to put the materials together. Three teachers, given a summer to work on the latter, might be able to collect sufficient information to cover three or four case studies comprehensively.

3. The Problem Solving Approach.

The course could be organized around a problem-solving process developed by professor Lawrence Senesh for the teaching of economics. The approach is adaptable, however, to a multidisciplinary course. The course would be divided into three phases: a motivating phase, a development phase, and a culminating phase. The motivating phase would consist of an introduction to contemporary American social problems in which students identify a particular problem-area which they will work on throughout the semester. Its purpose is to generate student interest. Students who choose the same research area would organize themselves into working committees, with the members of each committee working on individual sub-problems. The development phase of the main body of the course would consist of a careful analysis by the students of the problems they have selected, using for this purpose folders of material (newspaper and magazine articles, excerpts from books, the Congressional Record, and public documents, statistical data, etc.) collected by the teachers on a wide variety of social problems. The various techniques for analysis would be presented by the teachers in the classroom; the analysis would be done by students working individually and in small committees. In committees they would work through the six steps in the Senesh problem-solving model: discovering symptoms of the problem, surveying aspects of the problem, defining the problem, determining the scope of the problem, analyzing causes of the problem, and suggesting solutions for the problem. The culminating phase would give the students the opportunity to summarize what they have learned through

presentations to the class.

If this approach were selected, students would be assigned to classrooms and to working committees on the basis of problem interests. That is, at any given period of the day, individual classrooms would be working on a general problem area, say, "The City." Committees within the classroom would work on separate problem areas, "Pollution," "Urban Renewal," etc., with individual students working on particular aspects of those problems. The teachers would have two roles: 1) coordination of the work of one classroom in a general problem area and 2) social studies discipline specialist, for which he would move about through the several classrooms.

The advantage of this approach is that the students would develop problem solving skills as well as an introduction to social studies perspectives. They would also be studying problems in much greater depth than in either of the above approaches, with the culminating phase providing the opportunity for each classroom to pull together various aspects of a general problem. The disadvantage is that it requires skill on the part of the teacher in using this particular problem-solving approach, which would require an adequate in-service program before the course was offered. It would also require considerable effort on the part of the teachers to collect sufficient materials for the students to work with throughout the semester. Course planning and development would require more time than either of the alternatives previously suggested.

III. Implementation:

Any of the alternatives suggested above or any combination thereof would require 1) planning, 2) materials development, and 3) in-service teacher training. The planning phase should begin immediately and should lead to an early departmental decision about the basic structure of the course. The problems involved in and the time required for develpment of materials will depend upon the decision about structure. Likewise, the need for in-service training will depend upon the extent to which the structure and organization of the course makes demands upon the teachers which they may not presently be able to meet.

The first of the three suggested approaches will probably require the least expenditure of time and energy in development and training. An afternoon departmental planning session this spring should be sufficient to decide upon the problem content of the course and the division of labor in the presentation of the several social studies perspectives. A one-week workshop in August immediately before the beginning of the fall semester might provide sufficient time for the development of the several social studies units, provided that the teachers will have done some searching for materials during the summer. That workshop might also provide sufficient in-service training for those teachers who will be venturing into somewhat unfamiliar social studies territory.

The second alternative or any structure which incorporates a multiple-case study approach will require additional planning time this spring and intensive work in materials development during the summer. It will be

essential to have packets or folders of materials ready for student use at the beginning of the semester. A somewhat broader in-service program, which would include a brief refresher course in the several social sciences (possibly extending into the first two or three weeks of the semester) would be highly desirable.

The third alternative or any approach which uses a specific problem-solving method with the problems broken down into progressively smaller units would require an even larger investment in planning, development, and training time. The amount of teaching materials required probably increases geometrically with each division of the problem.. This approach requires several, perhaps as many as six, general problems with two degrees of subdivision. Its implementation would surely require each of the teachers to work rather diligently through the summer to collect the necessary materials for the course. In addition to that, a one-week workshop should be sufficient to train the teachers in this particular problem-solving method. Additional in-service training in the nature of a refresher course in the social sciences would probably have to continue well into the fall semester.

IV. Conclusion:

It seems to us that the Fairview Social Studies Department has an extraordinary opportunity to develop a new approach to the teaching of the social studies. By adding to its curriculum an introductory course in the social studies, the department is venturing into nearly uncharted territory. This paper has focused on some possible structures for that

course and some of the problems which lie in the way of its implementation. Those problems are certainly not insurmountable, although they will require various expenditures of time and energy on the part of the Fairview faculty and various kinds of support from the school district. The opportunity is unusual; so will be the personal and professional rewards to the teachers who take advantage of it.